

Regional Transportation Plan 2001

Public Outreach & Involvement Program

Phase I Summary Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The *Regional Transportation Plan* (RTP) is the principal long-range planning document of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC). The 2001 RTP is a comprehensive, multi-billion-dollar plan that specifies the investments and strategies necessary for the maintenance, management and improvement of the Bay Area transportation network for the years 2001-2026. That network includes transit, highway, airport, seaport, railroad, bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

From late February to mid-May, MTC solicited public participation on the 2001 RTP development during Phase I of the RTP Public Outreach and Involvement Program. This input is helping to provide direction on regional priorities for the RTP's policy element, influence the list of funded projects that are included in the plan and define a set of alternative transportation funding approaches for the region. The program's findings will also help to identify issues that require more study and research and to influence other MTC actions outside the RTP process.

MTC will release a draft RTP and an accompanying draft environmental impact report (EIR) in August 2001. Phase II of the MTC's RTP Public Outreach and Involvement Program will follow with adoption of the final *Regional Transportation Plan* in November, 2001.

MTC EMBARKS ON PUBLIC OUTREACH AND INVOLVEMENT

Prior to its initiation, eight broad goals were established for the RTP Outreach and Involvement Program covering quality of participation, diversity, education, reach, accessibility, impact and participant satisfaction. Performance measures were adopted for each of these goals.

Phase I was designed to explore why citizens are drawn to support specific projects and to allow participants to both discuss their transportation values, needs and priorities, *and* debate the merits of specific projects to be included in the RTP.

Phase I began with a large kick-off workshop for the public on February 27, followed by a series of 28 targeted workshops in April and May, a Web-based survey modeled after the workshops and a regional telephone survey. A media relations campaign was mounted to encourage attendance and participation in Phase I activities, as well as to educate the public about the RTP.

The two-hour workshops combined a "walkaround" open house — to educate participants and give them the chance to vote on a range of transportation issues — with small- and large-group discussions. Many of the workshops were targeted at specific communities and interests, such as

business groups, low-income communities and seniors. The workshops sought to involve individuals and organizations that have previously not participated in the RTP planning process.

More than 4,000 members of the public participated in Phase I of the Public Outreach and Involvement Program, representing a diverse cross-section of the nine-county Bay Area.

RTP STAKEHOLDERS SEND MAJOR MESSAGES

Six major messages emerged from the workshops and the Web survey that were voiced by virtually all groups in the outreach process.

Message 1: Let us get more out of our existing transportation resources.

After investing billions of dollars in roads and transit in the Bay Area, we should maximize the return on this significant investment through better management, improved maintenance and more efficient operation of the existing system. Specific suggestions included filling underutilized carpool/bus lanes, using signal timing and other technologies to relieve congested streets, improving the performance of *existing* buses and trains, and filling gaps in the current bike-lane system.

Message 2: We are having tremendous problems moving people and freight — caused by both traffic congestion and inadequate transit service—and we are worried because things are getting worse, not better.

Individuals voiced a real sense of urgency about the serious impacts on their lives, their businesses and the Bay Area's quality of life from traffic congestion, inadequate transit services and other transportation problems. A major finding from many of the workshops was that our Bay Area transportation problems appear to be getting worse, not better. Responding to this crisis, workshop participants supported new transportation funding mechanisms. They proposed that transportation planners use trial programs and pilot projects to test new and unique approaches. They also made a plea for stronger leadership from MTC and other transportation agencies to provide the vision and direction that the region desperately needs.

Message 3: We will take transit more if some of the key obstacles are removed.

A number of workshop participants indicated that they would take transit more often if transportation agencies removed some of the key barriers that discourage transit use, such as inadequate local transit connections to rail stations, too many different tickets and passes, and personal safety concerns. Specific suggestions included transit agencies working together to improve intersystem transfers, a single ticket fare card, a series of safety improvements, improved

bus and shuttle connections to rail stations and trial programs for free transit service in specific areas.

Message 4: Transit is vital to low-income individuals, but it takes too long.

For individuals who depend on transit and paratransit to get to work, school and medical services, transit is not a choice; rather it is an essential part of their daily lives. The number one transit issue for those who depend on transit was that trips on transit take too long, sometimes taking 5 to 10 times longer than driving. Participants also spotlighted infrequent service, lack of evening and weekend services, the high cost of transit and buses and trains to areas that are not currently served. Specific suggestions included faster bus service by expanding bus-only lanes on streets and freeways, expanding trains and light rail, providing more direct services to major destinations such as large medical centers, providing longer hours for transit at night and during the weekend, and subsidizing transit fares for low-income individuals.

Message 5: Land use and transportation cannot be separated.

Workshop and Web survey participants emphatically stated that land use and transportation cannot be separated. Transportation services must be coordinated with land-use planning if we are to avoid increased congestion, decreased mobility and a poorer quality of life. Transportation agencies cannot, by themselves, fix our transportation problems. Addressing the Bay Area's housing crisis is central to solving our long-term transportation problems. Specific suggestions included: building more affordable housing in the central Bay Area; developing much stronger partnerships between government agencies responsible for land-use and transportation planning; building or rebuilding communities around transit, walking, and biking; and providing incentives to cities and housing developers to increase the supply of housing near transit services.

Message 6: We do not understand who is in charge.

The complicated transportation decision-making process often confused and sometimes angered workshop participants. In most cases, they were not familiar with the agencies that were listed. Hearing how many entities were involved made it difficult for many to understand who is in charge of improving the transportation system, who makes the decisions, and whom local citizens should be persuading or pressuring. The frustration was heightened by a perception that agencies tend toward "passing the buck." Specific suggestions included consolidating planning agencies and plans, consolidating transit service providers, defining clearer authority for each transportation agency, and pushing decision-making down to the lowest level possible within an organization. Participants also requested more regional leadership from MTC.

WORKSHOP AND WEB USERS VOICE THEIR VIEWS

Satisfaction with Transportation

People were generally dissatisfied with the Bay Area transportation system for work trips, medical trips, school and after-school trips, child-care trips, and recreation trips, with fewer than 20 percent of participants saying that they had a high level of satisfaction for any of these trips.

Key Mobility Challenges

Key mobility challenges identified, in order of importance, were:

- Too much congestion on freeways
- Too much congestion on local streets and roads
- Transit takes too long
- Transit does not go where I need to go
- Too hard/dangerous to get around on a bike
- Transit does not run when I need to travel

Support for New Funding

Participants supported new funding mechanisms including:

- New half-cent sales tax
- 10-cent per gallon regional gas tax
- Additional \$1 bridge toll
- Higher vehicle registration fees
- New state transportation bonds

Participants opposed higher transit fares and new property taxes.

Investment Choices

When presented with limited “forced” choices, participants tended to favor maintenance/operation of transit and roads over expansion, transit improvements over road improvements and improvements that benefit work trips as opposed to non-work trips.

Participants' top choices for allocating new funding, in order of preference, were:

- Expand train services/add trains
- Expand bicycle and pedestrian facilities
- Maintain and replace street and highway pavement
- Expand express and local buses
- Provide more transit service to low-income neighborhoods

Environmental Protection

To ensure environmental protection, participants supported several measures:

- New housing and office developments that promote and enhance transit use
- Expanded public transit
- An accelerated shift to low-emission vehicles
- More bicycle/pedestrian facilities
- More financial and other incentives to take transit

Accommodating Growth

Participants expressed strong support for:

- Incentives that promote mixed-income housing and other compact development near transit lines
- Revitalizing and building new housing in central Bay Area cities and older suburbs
- Building new housing and other development along existing transit lines in central cities and older suburbs and along new transit lines in new suburbs

Lifeline Transit Services

Participants defined the most vital lifeline services as improved transit services to work, improved transit services to school and lower transit fares for low-income individuals.

Most participants wanted to fund lifeline transit operations by increasing overall efficiency of transit services, and many supported shifting money from streets and roads to transit. Some supported shifting funds from transit capital projects to transit operations.

Freight and Airport/Seaport Access

Improving ground transportation to seaport/airport facilities and improving mobility for trucking received strong support from participants.

RTP Goals/Values

When participants were asked to rank the top-level goals of the RTP, equity, environmental protection, the livability and viability of neighborhoods and districts, a healthy economy and efficient movement of goods and people were all scored somewhat equally.

SOME TELEPHONE POLL RESULTS ECHO WORKSHOP AND WEB RESULTS

In addition to the workshops and Web survey, MTC conducted a separate regional telephone poll of registered voters that probed some of the same transportation issues. An analysis of the three methods shows several key areas of agreement.

All three methods (telephone poll, workshops, Web survey) found:

- Widespread dissatisfaction with the Bay Area's transportation system.
- Three top challenges: Traffic congestion is the number one issue overall; there are a number of serious problems with public transit; and traffic makes biking and walking unsafe.
- Significant support for expanding rail services, maintaining streets and roads, expanding bus services and implementing a single ticket fare card.
- A desire for building housing along BART and transit lines, and building new housing and transportation in developed areas (central cities/older suburbs).
- The need to shift truck cargo to rail or ferry, dedicate lanes for trucks on freeways and encourage more night deliveries instead of day goods movement.
- Fear about bike safety issues from traffic that poses a significant obstacle to increased use of bicycles.
- Majority support for a half-cent sales tax, higher vehicle registrations and new state transportation bonds and overwhelming opposition to raising transit fares to fund new transportation improvements.
- Majority support for shifting some funding from roads to lifeline transit operations, shifting some funding from transit capital expenditures to lifeline transit operations, plus overwhelming opposition to reducing commute transit services to fund more non-commute period transit.